

RELIGION THAT MAKES SENSE

Of all people who have ever lived, this generation, which saw the birth of the third millennium, should be the most blessed. The twentieth century saw unprecedented advances in science and technology. The lives of men and women have been transformed. As we move into the twenty First Century, humanity should be reaping its rich rewards. We should be amongst the happiest and most contented people who have ever lived.

If we look honestly at our own situation, and that of those around us, we see that is not the case. Despite all our material comforts, very few claim to be truly happy and contented with their lot. Life is often described as 'a rat race.' Some are saying, "Stop the world, I want to get off!" For many in the Western world, life has largely lost its meaning and purpose. Christianity provides no answers. People say they find the churches cold and empty. Christianity is seen as being boring and irrelevant.

The First Century Church

This was not the case in First Century churches. Early Christians found meaning and purpose of life in the church. Their example convinces us that they had something that is drastically missing in most churches today. History records that they were prepared to risk their lives for something that was very precious to them. Today's churches bare little resemblance to original Christianity. So what has happened to modern Christianity?

Jesus commissioned twelve of his followers (called Apostles) to take the Gospel message throughout the Roman Empire, which was the extent of the know world in that day. To those who listened and believed it had a most dynamic effect.

Others, especially the Jews, who had much to loose, opposed the preaching of the Gospel and the establishment of Christian churches. Their opposition to the spread of Christianity often led to violence and bloodshed.

It was said that the Gospel had the effect of turning the world upside down. The Bible gives us the example of the Apostle Paul, preaching in the Greek city of Thessalonica. Unbelieving Jews tried to defend their faith from further defections. They organised a riot and set the city in an uproar. They dragged some of the Christians before the rulers of the city and cried out:

"These who have turned the world upside down have come here too." (Acts 17:6)

A living faith

The lives of these Christians had meaning and purpose. They had a living faith that influenced all aspects of their daily living. It affected their lives so deeply that its adherents were prepared to suffer violence and even death at the hands of non-Christian protesters.

The vital question we must ask is, "Where does one get this kind of faith?"

Consider the example Paul, given in the Bible, who on occasions was beaten, stoned and thrown into prison. But this did not deter him from his faith. Nor did it stop him wanting to share it with others. Notice the example given in the Bible:

"Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went

into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” (Acts 14:19-20)

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, Christians were hunted down like wild animals and thrown in prison. Some were tied to stakes and covered in oil to make human torches to light up Nero’s palace at night. Many were thrown to the lions for public entertainment. These Christians were prepared to die, rather than deny their faith. Theirs was a religion that made sense, and was extremely relevant to their way of life.

There are still a few today whose faith is so precious to them that they would be prepared to suffer for their faith if necessary. These are people whose faith is based upon Bible teaching, rather than the traditions of the church. Fortunately we are rarely called upon to risk our lives for our faith in this age. To those who have this precious faith, life has real purpose and meaning. They have a religion that makes sense.

Key to understanding the Bible

This kind of faith can only be found in the Bible. Yet most who have tried to read the Bible find it a closed book. It is necessary to find the key to understanding the Bible. This key is easily obtained; yet few possess it. It is within the grasp of each one of us, yet few seek it. It imparts the knowledge that leads to the purpose and meaning of life, yet few try to find it. The Bible reveals the way to eternal life, yet there are few who desire it.

This inspired Word of God has a golden thread running through it from beginning to end. It is made up of a series of connecting references found scattered throughout the book. Put them together and you have the key of knowledge to understanding the Bible.

Then there is the problem of interpretation. These Scriptures make it perfectly obvious that when a particular passage is not clear, one is not at liberty to make ones own interpretation. The Bible says:

No prophecy (teaching) of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy (teaching) never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Where difficulty exists there invariably are other passages dealing with the same subject, which reveal what we want to know. The Bible is its own interpreter.

This has been the downfall of the church. Through the centuries churchmen have made their own interpretations, which are now accepted as part of the traditions of the church. Because most Christians accept these traditions without question today, the church has become ineffective, and worse, deprives its followers of hope. Notice that Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day for doing the same thing:

“Woe to you lawyers! (Teachers of the Law of Moses) For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.” (Luke 11:52)

The Gospel — the key of understanding

The true Gospel is the key to understanding the Bible. The word ‘Gospel’ means ‘good news’. It sums up Gods plan and purpose for the earth, and for men and women upon it. It is centred in the work of His son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The true gospel is the essence of a religion that makes sense.

This key of knowledge was first preached to Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, around 1920 B.C. The prophets of God understood the gospel in Old Testament times (times prior to the birth of Jesus). In New Testament times (after the birth of Jesus) a famous apostle named Paul, in a letter to the churches in Galatia, confirmed this fact:

And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel to Abraham beforehand. (Galatians 3:8)

This key, which had been preached so many centuries previously, had become lost by the time of Jesus was born. Over the course of many centuries the religious leaders had ignored this knowledge, which is necessary for salvation, substituting for it their own traditions and teachings. Jesus condemned the religious leaders of his day with the following words:

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.” (Matthew 23:13)

The Gospel was taught by Jesus and the Apostles

We read that the Gospel was the central theme of the teaching of Jesus:

Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. (Matthew 9:35)

It was the heart of his message, which Jesus commanded the Apostles to preach throughout the known world:

Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptised will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:15-16)

Peter and the other Apostles were commanded to preach this key of knowledge throughout the known world, to the Jews first, and then the gentiles (non Jews). In this way the key of knowledge was restored.

He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter answered and said, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus answered and said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” (Matthew 16:15-20)

Jesus was not ordaining Peter as the first bishop of Rome, as some claim. Clearly he was referring to the keys of knowledge to the understanding of the gospel, as the Bible shows. Peter and the Apostles used the first key to unlock the gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36-42). Some three thousand Jews were baptised on that day alone. Peter used the second key to unlock the knowledge to understanding the Gospel to the gentiles (non Jews) when Cornelius (a centurion of the Italian Regiment) was baptised, along with his entire believing household. From these two uses of the keys of knowledge, the good news of the Gospel spread all around the Roman Empire.

The keys lost again

It was because the key of knowledge had been restored that the First Century church became such a dynamic institution. The early Christians had a real hope that makes sense, and if necessary they would die rather than renounce it. But Jesus foresaw a time when false teachers would once again lead the church astray, and he gave the following warning:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. (Matthew 7:15)

In the years following Christ and the apostles, these false prophets began their work, and are still active today. Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament, gave an even clearer warning:

But even if we (the apostles), or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-9)

He gave this warning because these false teachers were already infiltrating the young churches, and there was a danger that the key of knowledge could be lost, even in his day:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

During the two thousand years that have elapsed since Christ and his apostles the false prophet have been active. False teachings were introduced to the church at the expense of the true gospel. They are now considered to be the basis of Christianity found in most churches today. Once again the key of knowledge had been lost men and women have been denied God's blessings in this life, and the hope of everlasting life to come.

The Bible is our guide

But all is not lost. We have available to us God's Word of Truth, the Holy Bible, completed by the Apostles before the end of the First Century. Despite its great antiquity, the Bible is the book for today. For those who are prepared to diligently search its pages, it reveals the true Gospel as preached by Jesus and the Apostles. History suggests that small groups of true believers have found these keys of knowledge, and have acted upon them. Today, all men and women who are prepared to seek in the pages of the Bible will find the key to a religion that makes sense. Jesus himself tells us we should seek this key in a prayerful attitude:

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8)

Jesus implies here that it is not a simple task, but involves diligently asking, seeking and knocking at the pages of the Bible. To those who find it, the prize is of inestimable value:

"Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gains understanding; for her proceeds are better than the profits of silver, and her gain than fine gold. She is more precious than rubies, and all the things you may desire cannot compare with her." (Proverbs 3:13-15)

What shall we do?

There is only one guide to for a religion that makes sense, and that is the Holy Bible. It makes astounding claims for itself. It asserts that its writers were inspired in what they wrote by God himself. Indeed it claims to be the very Word of God. Notice what it says of itself:

“The Holy Scriptures ...are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”
(2 Timothy 3:15)

Because God inspired the Bible it contains the key of knowledge to help a person find peace of mind, and meaning and purpose in this life, and eternal life to come.

A Religion that makes Sense

You are reading the first in a series of studies aimed at introducing you to the Holy Bible, and the Gospel preached by Jesus.

The Dawn Christadelphians invite you to read on through the studies, which follow, with the aim of helping you understand a religion that makes sense. Don't worry that you don't understand the Bible, or that it has always seemed a closed book to you. You will be amazed at how quickly you learn to find your way around the Bible and how your understanding of it is growing.

All we ask is that you read each study. All statements that we make are supported by Scripture references. We also ask that you look up these references in your own Bible to confirm that what we say is true. Don't just believe what we say. Believe what the Bible says. Remember, the great eternal God has inspired it. As you consider what to do, Jesus has some words, which you may find relevant:

Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall. (Matthew 7:24-27)

Your textbook is the Bible. We recommend the King James Version (KJV) or the New King James Version. All our quotations come from the New King James Version.

We wish you well in your search for the keys to the understanding of the Bible. We hope that you find peace of mind in the religion that makes sense. We further hope that you and your family find the meaning and purpose in life which God intended.

For more studies, please visit our website: www.biblenews.org